

THE AMERICAN NATIONAL PREACHER.

No. 7.

NEW-YORK, DECEMBER, 1831.

VOL. 6.

SERMON CXV.

By REV. CHARLES JENKINS,

PORTLAND, MAINE.

THE SPIRITUAL AND ELEVATED NATURE OF TRUE PIETY.

PROVERBS, XV. 24.—*The way of life is above to the wise, that he may depart from hell beneath.*

It might have been expected, apart from the express testimony of revelation, that a religion whose appropriate agency it is to raise men to heaven, would be something very far above the common range of worldly virtue and morality. And yet, if we take our estimation of that religion from the sentiments, tastes, and pursuits of very many who are professedly its subjects, it will by no means be found remarkably lofty in its character. An opinion formed from a knowledge of the agency which this religion is designed to execute, will certainly find but little to give it strength in the character and lives of most of its professors. Indeed, were we to look solely at this exhibition of its nature and effects, we should be constrained to admit that no peculiar purity and power belong to it, and that after all, it is no marvellous thing to become truly religious. Happy for the world we are not thus limited in our means of ascertaining the nature of true religion. In the word of God it is so variously described and defined, that however strangers we may be ourselves to any experience of its power, and rarely as we may meet with any thing like a full representation of it in real life, we may yet acquaint ourselves with its distinctive features. This we are urged to do by the most affecting considerations of duty and interest.

If we glance at the pages of the Bible, we shall perceive that spiritual religion is there presented as an abstract and elevated concern. Its one great and obvious feature, as there delineated, is its opposition, at once to the predominant temper and bias of the native human heart, and to the controlling maxims and pursuits of the world. The Bible represents the subjects of saving piety as seeking present and endless felicity in a way far above "the common walks of virtuous life." Let our text be taken as an example of the brief, plain, and striking manner in which the Bible uniformly represents that religion which is *pure and undefiled before God*. *The way of life is above to the wise, that he may depart from hell beneath.* Here, it is thought, are suggested certain views of an exalted piety as exemplified in the principles, feelings, and aims of men, which it must ever be interesting and profitable to take. *The way of life* is the way of saving piety. It is eminently a high way. They are wise who find and pursue it,—they who do not continue to tread the way that leads to death.

In following out the views here presented, I will notice several particulars in which *the way of life is above to the wise.*

I. *It is elevated in principle.*

No sentiment is more unscriptural or unphilosophical than that a person may feel and conduct right, when the speculative views and governing considerations of his mind are decidedly erroneous or defective. Every one who will carefully examine the train of his own thoughts and emotions, will perceive that the feelings take their character from the views of the mind; and that the feelings always impress their own image on the course of conduct to which they lead. Accordingly it will be found, that no one is better than his principles. *As a man thinketh in his heart so is he.* Strictly speaking, no one can be called a person of principle, who is not decidedly religious according to the standard of the Bible. For that cannot be called with propriety *principle* in morals or religion, which has not a fixed character and invariable tendency. And none but the consistently religious have motives or grounds of action which are settled and uniform in their influence. But as they who live strangers to the power of an inward piety are influenced by a certain class of considerations, inconstant and fluctuating indeed, it is admitted by universal consent that they have their principles. What I am concerned to show is, that the motive or ground of action with the truly pious is far more elevated than that which prompts the conduct of others.

I observe, in the first place, that their religion is *elevated in principle above the received maxims of worldly prudence.* Such a prudence is actually nothing more than a selfish and time-serving policy. It extends solely to interests of a personal and temporary nature. Its views are narrowed down to a class of objects which have connection with nothing beyond earth, and time, and self. If we examine those prudential considerations which have an ascendancy where religion has not, they will be found exceedingly low and confined in their reference. Prudence may be defined, in general, to be that department of practical wisdom which consists in the discovery and pursuit of things that should be sought, and the detection and abandonment of things that should be avoided. Now it is obvious, that while there can never be but two great classes of objects, one of which *ought* to be sought, and the other avoided, the views and feelings of men may be such as to lead them in practice to substitute one of these classes for the other, and to seek what they *should* avoid, and avoid what they *should* seek. This is the case with those whose conduct is governed by the *maxims of worldly prudence.* Theirs is a mistaken prudence—mistaken through the influence of minds darkened and tastes vitiated by sin. The class of objects which all men *ought* to seek includes the divine glory and human salvation. But men of worldly prudence neglect this, and thus contribute to dishonor God and destroy the souls of men. They neglect this high end of all created action, because their minds are not lifted up to take distant and comprehensive views, and especially because they want sensibilities to the value and importance of this end. With objects of present personal reference they keenly sympathize; of these they gain a distinct perception; these they regard with a wakeful interest in their course of life. But not being the objects which they were formed to seek and enjoy, their narrow views, their confined sympathies, and their limited aim fail to yield them even the present good they seek. While they deem it prudent to live to themselves, even themselves are unblest and unsatisfied. While their maxims of prudence induce them to

seek their own and not the things that are Christ's, their own best present good is not secured. While they are endeavoring carefully to lay up for themselves a comfortable portion here, their endeavors are substantially fruitless; for their possessions become only the occasion of increased solicitude or of new and keener disappointments. It is among the maxims of worldly prudence to compromise religious principle, rather than encounter opposition, or incur censure from the world—to withhold truth rather than meet reproach—to buy peace rather than give pain—to leave men to perish rather than cease to please them. Now the truly wise, who are pursuing the high way of life, are so raised above the influence of these maxims, that, if they feel it, they do not obey it. They feel strongly in view of the great things that are to be sought, and the great things that are to be avoided. Theirs is that sublime principle of prudence which prompts them to *lay up treasures in heaven*—to live to him who died for them—to sacrifice human approbation to heavenly acceptance—to subject men to present pain, rather than that they should experience endless punishment. Is not this the only true prudence?

It may be observed, in the second place, that the religion of the truly wise is elevated in principle above the accredited standard of worldly morality. When the native human character is considered, and the slow progress which man, under the most favorable circumstances, makes towards any true sublimity of sentiment, it should not surprise us that the form of this world's ethics is low. Where no influence from revelation is felt, there is scarcely any progress at all in this direction. And where the more common influence of the gospel extends, so numerous and unyielding are the obstacles in the way of its full operation, and so slow and reluctant are men to bring their minds to contemplate spiritual things, or to look steadily at a rule of duty which is fitted to show them with an alarming distinctness the guilty depths in which they lie, we should not be startled to find the great body of men governed by principles of action which can scarcely be perceived to have any affinity to those which Christianity suggests and produces. Such, in truth, is the mournful fact in relation to the mass of almost every Christian community. And what is a far more painful fact, not a few who may be hoped to have experienced even the saving power of the gospel, are seen so strongly to sympathize with the surrounding mass, as to substitute its rule of right and duty for that which is presented in the holy gospel they profess! Indeed, instead of the universal and everlasting principles of action which Scripture reveals, the professedly religious are seen to adopt and act upon those which are received among men who are not privileged with an opportunity of borrowing their rules from the word of God. My limits forbid even a passing notice of the numerous defective points in that scheme of morality which is current among men. It may be sufficient to say, that its grand defect, and one that stands out conspicuously in its every feature, is its utter disregard of the character of motives. With the world, if the outward form of an action does not conflict with any of its loose and unsettled rules of conduct, it meets the full demand of its morality. No matter what is transpiring in the heart; no matter how much of malice, and murder, and lust, and envy are rankling there, if their image is not impressed on the visible deportment. No matter if the very bitterness of hatred is within, if the smile of kindness appears without. No matter how much we wrong our fellows by the secret feelings and opinions we cherish, provided there is no expression of them by actions or words. But God looks on the

heart; he requires *truth* there. And it is by reference to its state, that all those who have been taught of God estimate character and conduct. What ever mere nominal Christians, or such as walk in darkness because they live not up to their privileges, whatever these may do, the truly wise who are decidedly in the *way of life*, are in principle raised above the thought of estimating their character by the rule of this world's ethics, or of regarding any action right while the heart is wrong.

Let it be observed, in the *third place*, that saving piety is elevated in principle above the authority of prevailing opinions. It might doubtless be safely assumed, that a religion which is from God, would involve principles of action much more fixed and invariable than the opinions of erring and mutable man. And it is one obvious proof that our holy religion is of divine original, that it furnishes motives to action of a nature constant, independent, and unvarying. The subjects of the proper efficacy of this religion, adopting in heart the great truths of Scripture as the canon of their sentiments and the grounds of their conduct, are lifted above the conflicting and unsettled opinions of the unbelieving world. If they feel, they do not yield to the power of such an influence. And it has power—a power which more or less sways every one—a power which has been impiously likened to the mighty energy of that voice which brought the created universe into being. Yet they who dwell “fast by the Oracle of God,” and amid the pure regions of faith enjoy spiritual contemplations, are not disturbed by it. They live in a sphere above it. The *way of life* along which they are advancing, lies indeed within sight of the tumultuous fluctuation of views and aims which disturb the world; but lies at a safe distance. And it is not only *safe* to be aloof from such a conflict, but there is present consolation in the consciousness of security amid so much that is proving disastrous to others.

’Tis sweet to stand, when tempests tear the main,
On the firm cliff, and mark the seaman’s toil !
Not that another’s dangers soothe the mind ;
But from such toil how sweet to feel secure !
Yet sweeter far on Wisdom’s height serene,
Upheld by truth, to fix our firm abode ;
To watch the giddy crowd that, deep below,
For ever wander in pursuit of bias,
Amid opinion’s ever-varying strife.

II. *The wise who are in the way of life are elevated in taste.*

There is a much closer connection between sound religion and good taste than is generally considered. The person of true piety, other things being equal, is better qualified to judge of merit in all the various departments appropriate to the exercise of taste, than one who is a stranger to the power of experimental religion. The contrary I know is sometimes insisted on; but there is every thing in religion to purify and chasten, to elevate and strengthen all the faculties of the mind. It must give a quickness to discern, and a sensibility to feel the beauties and deformities in objects of every kind, especially those of a moral and religious character. But when those in the *high way of life* are said to be elevated in taste, a *religious taste* is chiefly intended—a taste which is occupied in judging of, and relishing or disrelishing objects, as it respects their moral and religious qualities. In this respect I proceed to observe,

In the first place, that they who are eminently the wise unto salvation, are elevated in taste above the more external decorations of their persons or dwellings. Special solicitous attention to these is pretty generally regarded as a mark of a mind limited in its range and feeble in its powers. An intelligent mind would be above it. And even a proud philosophy could despise it. But a mind deeply imbued with the spirit of the gospel, and conversant with the high walks of spiritual contemplations, cannot descend to it without doing violence to its purest feelings, and interrupting its most sacred delights. Such a mind resembles that *which was in Christ*: and all who possess it must be entirely superior to any feelings of self-gratulation, or secret complacency in being able to adorn their perishing bodies, or to add to the splendor of their earthly habitations. They will think so much of being speedily arrayed in heavenly robes *clean and white*, that they will be comparatively indifferent to what they now put on. So familiar will they be with the glories of the mansions in their *Father's house* on high, that it will seem at once foolish and vain to their enlightened judgments, and disgusting to their quickened senses of beauty and grandeur, to attempt to accumulate circumstances of magnificence about those perishable structures here, which they are on the eve of quitting forever, and which the flight of a few years must wholly deface and destroy. O they who are in their high career heavenward along *the way of life*, cannot come down to such trifles, cannot be attracted by the dim glitter of earthly splendor, cannot heap useless appendages on the body which to-morrow will be in the grave, or expend on the dwelling they to-day inhabit what might send the word of salvation to perishing thousands. And if they cannot, what must be thought of many avowed followers of the Savior who hesitate not to do all this?

Again, they who are decidedly in *the way of life* are elevated in taste above the desire of human applause. Men destitute of such a taste are sometimes brought to perceive the emptiness of mere worldly estimation. They see it does not charm away sorrow. They see it does nothing at all towards reaching the core of human wretchedness. But they who have been cheered with the tones of divine compassion breathing forth the accents, *Neither do I condemn thee, go in peace*, have no longer an ear for the sweetest music that ever sounded in the language of human praise. Once it was grateful to them. No melody waked up intenser raptures than the voice of applause from their fellows. Once they could live on the breath that wafted it to their ear. Now it comes grating harsh dissonance with the tones of every fibre in their heart-strings. It is not barely because they have detected its emptiness. It is not so much because they have experienced its impotency in yielding sober quiet to the mind. But it is because their very heart sickens at the idea of being applauded for what, in the view of God, merits rather shame and reproach; because it savors of the devices of him who would tempt them from the path of life by presenting to their minds something to foster a feeling of self-exaltation. Indeed, so far are the eminently spiritually-minded from desiring tokens of worldly estimation and honor, they deprecate them; such tokens are disgusting to their taste—they are like daggers to their hearts.

It may be further observed, that the elevated spiritual taste of such as are in the way of life renders them superior to the admiration of merely talented men. Every age and country has been distinguished by some few individuals who, aided by certain favorable circumstances, have been brought under the public

eye, and raised to stations where extraordinary powers were demanded. Such men, towering above the level of ordinary minds, have attracted the wondering gaze, and shared the indiscriminate homage of all who have not learned from Scripture the true method of estimating human greatness. They, however, who are wise according to the testimony of inspiration, look for something better—something higher than intellectual grandeur alone, on which they can bestow their meed of admiration. It is the moral majesty of man which draws and absorbs their interested regard. It is the spiritual alliance of created with the uncreated mind that wins their homage. It is intellect bearing the fresh impress of heavenly features that secures their cordial esteem and veneration. It is impossible their minds, familiar as they are with what faith discovers of celestial wonders and glories, should be carried away with admiration of the mere splendor of intellect. It cannot dazzle and bewilder them, for they are accustomed to contemplate something higher and brighter. But there are other reasons why persons of eminent spirituality cannot relish and admire unsanctified talents. Such talents are always misapplied and abused. They are employed against Heaven. And thus perverted, they must entail on their admired and extolled possessors a deeper degradation—a more bitter retribution than is allotted to less gifted though equally misdirected minds. Instead, therefore, of directing towards them thoughts and feelings of admiring awe, they instinctively regard them with pity, as those who, though exalted to heaven, are in danger of being thrust down to hell.

Let it just be added that those who in some good degree are living up to the duties, privileges, and consolations of religion, are raised by their spiritual taste above the feeling of enthusiastic delight in the works of mere art, of taste, or of fancy. Religion, as it has been already remarked, more than any thing else, elevates and corrects the intellectual taste, and assists its decisions. But it does more: it gives a new taste, and opens a new field for its exercise and gratification. This new taste relates to things as holy or sinful—as possessing qualities of moral beauty or deformity, grandeur or debasement. The whole range of spiritual truth and spiritual scenes is the legitimate sphere for its exercise. They who imbibe this new taste have an exquisite relish for all the great marked features of divine truth, and find an exhaustless source of delight in the objects of heavenly contemplation. Thus gifted with a taste adapted to things of a higher and purer character, they become comparatively indifferent to that class of things which before interested and delighted them. Though their taste for this latter department of objects is no less correct than heretofore, it yields a delight less exquisite and absorbing; because it has come to be connected with a perception of what is more sublimely pure, and for that reason more attractive and gratifying. So that they would cease to be as deeply charmed as once with things which properly belong to the department of mere literary and intellectual taste, if it contained nothing positively offensive to a religious mind. But it is not so. Throughout the walks of literature, of art, and of fancy, ravishing beauties are mingled with disgusting deformities. Flowers lie thickly scattered over a mass of pollution. The heavenly-minded believer cannot, therefore, as he once could, range these walks with unmingled and enthusiastic delight. He had rather ponder some great truth of Scripture, than gaze at the clustering beauties which adorn the most splendid page of human literature. He had rather contemplate any

single feature in the inspired delineation of the New Jerusalem, than all that is grand and lovely in the efforts of genius and art.

III. *The way of life is above to the wise, in that they are elevated in pursuit.* Their practice is no less sublime than their principles and taste. They are as much above the common walks of worldly men in the character of their efforts, as they are in the views and relish of their minds. On this topic I can only very briefly observe,

That such as are in the way of life are elevated in pursuit above what might be deemed their worldly interest. The ground of their action, it has been observed, is the divine glory in the purification and salvation of men. This is the predominant motive that prompts their efforts. The end of their efforts is the end of their faith, even the salvation of their souls. Heaven is the prize of their high calling. The pursuit of this is no selfish aim, for it is the direct means of securing the great end for which man was created. Nor is the pursuit of heaven actually any dereliction of the best good which this world has to afford. For it is not to its most eager devotees, but to the aspirants after heaven, that the world yields its greatest benefits. It pours its richest blessings upon those who keep it beneath their feet. It rewards with all its real good those who despise it. While the followers in the way of life are seeking those things which might be deemed an abandonment of worldly interests, because they are superior to its pleasures, its praises, its opulence, and its honors, all that is valuable in these things comes into their possession and goes to accumulate the materials of their blessedness. Their pursuit is above these things, and yet the substance of them comes into their possession.

Again, they who are wise unto eternal life are elevated in pursuit above the present benefits of religion. They are less solicitous to find the way of wisdom the way of pleasantness, than to find it the way of holiness, and its end the fruition of God. It is things invisible for which they labour and endure, and not things seen and temporal. True, religion has its present benefits infinitely surpassing all other worldly and temporal good; but they are not worthy to be thought of, in comparison with the eternal weight of glory to be revealed and enjoyed in heaven. Far above the thought of these the genuine heirs of God are pursuing their incorruptible, undefiled, and unfailing inheritance.

Thus, my friends, in following the suggestions of the text, I have given you some of the more important features of their character who are evidently in their progress heavenward. They are elevated in principle above the received maxims of worldly prudence, above the accredited standard of worldly morality, and above the authority of common opinions. They are elevated in taste above the mere decoration of their persons and dwellings, above the desire of human applause, above the feeling of an absorbing admiration of merely talented men, and above the feeling of an enthusiastic delight in the works merely of art, of taste, or of fancy. They are elevated in pursuit above what might be deemed their worldly interests, and above the present benefits of piety. In view of all that has been said I cannot but remark,

1. That true religion, by which I mean that which is connected with the salvation of its subjects, is vastly more abstract, elevated, and holy than is generally supposed. Men think it what it is too commonly seen to be in the lives of its professors, and not what it is declared to be in the book of God. And its professors take up their notions of it from its more imperfect devel-

opments on earth, and thus rest at a point vastly below the one they are required to reach. It is impossible not to entertain the most painful apprehensions respecting the future destiny of great numbers who would seem to be in the way of life. They manifest scarcely a single genuine mark of a spiritual elevation of soul. I am concerned that all of my hearers who are yet able to hope that they are the subjects of so sublime a religion, would once more institute a most solemn investigation into their state. It is not improbable that such an inquiry would lead to discoveries fatal to the hopes of not a few, who will cheat themselves into a persuasion that they are in the way of life, while they are evidently not rising in principles, taste, or pursuit, to *depart from hell beneath*.

2. *Saving religion is above the conception of worldly minds.* They cannot comprehend its sublime principles. They know nothing adequately of its purity and sublimity of taste. The end it proposes, and which all its real subjects pursue with singleness of aim and unwavering determination, is altogether beyond the reach of their grovelling powers. The great desires and designs of the godly are apart from the range of their thoughts. Ah! none but those who feel the power of this religion, understand how unearthly it is. Let those who wonder at these strange assertions, and marvel that so common a thing as religion should be thus represented as above their conception, only learn its first principles, only taste of its blessedness, and their astonishment will cease. Though the ungodly cannot as such estimate its value, though they cannot send their thoughts to the high point of vision, of feeling, and happiness which the spiritually minded attain, let them only drink into its pure spirit, and they will begin to learn something of *the length and breadth, the height and depth* of its exceeding worth and importance.

3. *Saving piety is above the reach of worldly accident and changes.* The most serious and disastrous of these, are such as assail the mind and heart of man. But they whose treasure is *above*, cannot be subject to harm on this account, from whatever occurs here below. They *set their affection on things above*; and consequently the dearest objects to their heart cannot be withdrawn for ever from them, or at any time, so as to occasion them hopeless grief. Even should the world and all the lower works of God be blotted out of being, the subjects of *undefiled religion* will sympathize but little with the catastrophe—will suffer little by the change—will lose actually nothing by the mighty destruction. O how safe and blessed are the saints of God! Why does not such a view of their condition constrain the wicked to strive to make it their own?

4. To present them with an additional motive to do this, I add in conclusion, that *all who are not with the truly wise advancing in this elevated way to heaven above, are hastening their steps to hell beneath*. There are but two great ways, *the strait and narrow way of life* and *the broad way of death*. These two ways conduct to two immensely different ends. The one is an eternal heaven, the other is an eternal hell. Fellow-sinners, we may judge which of these ends we are about to reach, by the way which we now pursue. No truth is more plain, none more invariable, none more necessary, than that the way of every one is declarative of the end of that person. Ye who know that you are in the way of death, how can you proceed one step farther? I beg you to stop. You may yet arise and dwell with God. But if you resolve to go on your hitherto chosen way, you must sink to deep darkness and hopeless woe!

SERMON CXVI.

By REV. GEORGE A. CALHOUN,

NORTH COVENTRY, CONN.

THE CHARACTER, CONDUCT, AND DESTINY OF THE JAILER AND FELIX CONTRASTED.

ACTS, xvi. 29—34.—*Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas; and brought them out and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptised, he and all his, straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.*

ACTS, xxiv. 25—27.—*And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee. He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him. But after two years Porcius Festus came into Felix' room: and Felix, willing to show the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound.*

THESE passages of Scripture contain each a concise account of the religious character and conduct of an individual. And my object in presenting both before you at the same time is, that we may contrast the character and conduct of the trembling jailer at Philippi, with those of the trembling Felix at Cesarea, and derive instruction from the contrast. In relation to the Jailer and Felix, I observe,

1. *They were both sinners.* With regard to the jailer we have no information, except that contained in the text and context. That he was a sinner, is evident from the fact that all men are sinners; and that he possessed a character less desirable than that of many other unsanctified persons, is inferred from two circumstances. The first is, he was probably educated a heathen, and would, of course, be addicted to the vices and cruelties so common among those who are not under the restraining influence of the gospel. The second circumstance from which is deduced an inference unfavorable to his character, is his treatment of the apostles when they were committed to his custody. He thrust them into the most uncomfortable part of the prison, fastened their feet in the stocks, and, leaving their wounds undressed, retired to rest. That he might have treated the apostles with less severity, in consistency with his duty as keeper of the prison, is apparent from his subsequent conduct towards them. From our scanty knowledge of the jailer we must conclude,

that at the time he took Paul and Silas in custody, he was not only a *wicked*, but a *cruel* man.

Of Felix, before his interview with the apostle, the Bible gives us no account. That he did not sustain a character as exemplary as that of many other heathen, is the universal testimony of historians. He lived in an illegal manner with Drusilla, the lawful companion of another; and in administering the government of provinces, over which he was placed as procurator, he was oppressive and cruel. Felix was a man of more consequence than the jailer; and in proportion to the elevation of the station which he occupied, appears to have been his wickedness. Still there was a resemblance somewhat striking in the moral characters of these individuals. Both were sinners, and sinners of a cast more unpleasant than usual. I observe,

II. *They were both brought in an interesting manner within the reach of religious instruction.* In violation of law, and with cruel hands, were Paul and Silas committed to prison at Philippi. Their jailer, during the night, was roused from sleep by an earthquake, and seeing the doors of the prison opened, he supposed his life to be forfeited in consequence of the flight of his prisoners. In the phrensy of despair, when about to seal his condemnation for ever by the act of suicide, Paul gave him the pleasant and timely information, that though the doors of the prison were opened, and the bands of the prisoners were loosed, yet no prisoner had escaped. At this juncture the apostles preached to him the gospel. "They said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." "And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house."

In an illegal and cruel manner was Paul apprehended at Jerusalem, and sent to Felix at Cesarea, who detained him in custody. In making his defence against the false accusations of the Jews, Paul preached to Felix the doctrine of the resurrection. At another time, in the presence of Felix, Paul reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come. He doubtless gave him that instruction which was necessary for his salvation. We know not but the gospel was as fully and as clearly preached to Felix; as to the jailer. Both being Gentiles were taught the truths of Christianity by the great Apostle to the Gentiles. Paul preached to both. And while a prisoner he preached to both.

Thus far there was a coincidence in the providence of God in relation to these men. In the way of each was Paul cast; and cast too without their solicitation. In the first place he was called upon by the providence of God to communicate unto each the truths of our holy religion, without being requested; and afterward, in compliance with their wishes, he preached to them the same gospel of Christ. In relation to the jailer and Felix, I observe,

III. *They were both convicted of sin under the instructions which they received from the apostles.* The jailer and Felix each gave a listening ear to what was said by the inspired preacher. They doubtless regarded what Paul communicated as being the truth of God. At that critical and solemn period—the period of death temporal, and death eternal—when the jailer heard from the lips of Paul the mild and timely caution, "Do thyself no harm," with the addition, "we are all here;" then was he brought to view himself a sinner. The deadly weapon dropped from his hands: he sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas. But what occasioned this trembling? The danger resulting from the supposed escape of

the prisoners was past; and all pertaining to the prison, and to himself as keeper, was now safe. He did not plead with the apostles to aid him in closing the doors of the prison, or in replacing the bands of the prisoners. The effects of the earthquake on the prison did not occupy his attention. "And he sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas." His terror was great. And what caused this terror? The friendly conduct of the apostles, in connection with the extraordinary occurrence which had just taken place, were made effectual, by the Holy Spirit, shed down from heaven to convince him of sin; and he trembled lest he should experience the second death. The jailer was now a convicted sinner.

And while the Roman governor was listening to the reasoning of Paul on the subject of righteousness, temperance, and judgment, he too was disquieted. "Felix trembled." And what caused the hardened Roman to tremble? He was Paul's judge, invested with the power of life and death, and Paul was in bonds. Was it the sight of the unarmed prisoner before him, which caused Felix to tremble? No violence was offered. No threats were uttered. But Paul reasoned, and Felix heard him. And as he listened to the truths of God, as exhibited in the simple reasoning of the Apostle, his sins, like an angry cloud about to burst upon him, came to view. Then was near Felix an invisible agent, whose office it is to convince of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. He now saw himself to be a sinner, and he felt the sting of a guilty conscience—the distress of a self-condemned sinner—and looking unto a judgment to come, he trembled. While in the presence of Paul and listening to his words, both the jailer and Felix became convicted sinners. I observe,

IV. *They both resolved to engage in the concerns of their salvation.* Convinced as they were of the importance of salvation, they could do nothing less than resolve to give it their attention. And that they did thus resolve, is evident from their conduct. The jailer, with trembling solicitude inquired, what he must do to be saved? This he would not have done, under existing circumstances, had he not determined to engage in the concerns of his soul. He was evidently resolved, when he had learned what to do to be saved, *to do it.*

And from the manner of Felix's speaking to Paul, as well as from the state of feeling which he manifested under the exhibition of truth; we derive evidence, that it was not his intention when he dismissed the apostle, to abandon the subject of religion; but it was clearly his purpose to resume it, and give it his particular attention. "And as Paul reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season I will call for thee." Here we find his resolution, not only to engage in the concerns of his soul, but to employ the apostle as his religious teacher.

Thus far the two men whose characters we have been contemplating, appear alike. There was a striking resemblance between them. They were alike sinners, and sinners of a cast more unpleasant than usual. They were both religiously instructed by the Apostle to the Gentiles, while he was in bonds to them. They were both convicted of sin, and caused to tremble in view of the wrath to come. And they both resolved to engage in their salvation. Yet there was a period when a dissimilarity between them commenced. Hence, I observe,

V. *The jailer resolved to delay no longer his immortal interests, while Felix*

put off the subject to a future period. The jailer's conduct at this time is worthy of serious regard, and of imitation. So soon as convicted of his sin, he earnestly sought the way of salvation. No time was lost in needless conversation respecting the earthquake. No care of the prison or of the prisoners was suffered to divert his attention. No cavilling spirit was indulged in relation to the instructions of the apostles. Prostrate before the ambassadors of Christ, he sought the way of life with a solicitude deep and earnest. He evidently felt in his own heart the import of that scripture, "Behold now is the accepted time: behold now is the day of salvation." The needful repose of night could not call him away from this interesting subject. Every word, every motion indicated that his soul was intent on securing, without delay, his immortal interests.

But it was far different with Felix. Though trembling in view of his sins and the wrath to come,—though resolved to attend to the interests of his soul,—he was not yet determined to make religion his first business. Hence he did not, with the jailer, inquire what he should do to be saved? But he said to the preacher, "Go thy way for this time, when I have a convenient season I will call for thee." Difficulties in the way of reformation, in his conduct, or business, or pleasure, induced him to postpone the subject to a future period. And the subject was postponed to give place for that which was more in accordance with the unsanctified feelings of the Roman governor. I observe,

VL *The jailer soon gave evidence of piety, while Felix afforded evidence of increasing hardness of heart.* Ere the sun had streaked the east, the jailer believing, was joyful in the Lord. To his solicitous inquiry: "What must I do to be saved?" the apostles replied: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." And now, instead of the severity and cruelty which he had manifested towards the apostles on their commitment, he showed himself to be a friend of God's persecuted servants. The same hour of the night he took Paul and Silas, and washed the stripes which the day before were inflicted upon them. And he was baptized, he and all his, straightway. And he received the apostles into his own house, and treated them with all the kindness of a brother's love. And in the morning, when the magistrates sent to have Paul and Silas set at liberty, thus to escape the reproach of their illegal and iniquitous proceeding, the jailer, in friendship, gave Paul information of their base intentions. The change which was thus suddenly wrought in the character of the jailer, was that new birth which is essentially requisite for the kingdom of heaven. He afforded full evidence of possessing a new nature, and of being enrolled with the sons of God.

But how was it with Felix? When divine truth was urged upon his conscience by the energy of the Holy Spirit, did he say, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief?" This was not his language; but he said, "Go thy way for this time." He unquestionably expected that a convenient season was not far distant. And did the expected season soon arrive? He subsequently enjoyed opportunities for communing with Paul; but were righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, topics of his conversation with the apostle? We hear no more of Felix's trembling under divine truth. When, by a resolution to improve a future period in relation to his soul, he stifled his conviction of sin, and calmed the agitations of his troubled breast; he not only caused Paul to go his way for that time, but the Holy Ghost to depart. He afterward conversed with the Apostle, and sent for him the oftener, because he hoped

that money would be given him for Paul's freedom. And to secure some pecuniary advantage to himself, he kept that persecuted servant of Jesus two whole years in bondage. And when his office expired and he was succeeded by Festus, to gratify the malice of the Jews, and prevent them from complaining to the emperor of the injustice and cruelty of his administration, he left Paul a prisoner at Cesarea. The Bible continues the history of Felix for about two years after the time of his trembling before the apostle. During that period, we have convincing evidence of his increasing hardness of heart. While the jailer afforded satisfactory evidence that he was a child of God, the conduct of Felix presented lamentable proof that he became more and more a child of the devil. I observe,

VII. *It is probable that the jailer is now in heaven, and that Felix is in the world of despair.* I know of no reason for doubting any more the salvation of the jailer, than that of any other saint whose name is recorded in the Bible. His conversion appears to have been recorded in the Scriptures as a real conversion, and his conduct to have been such as characterizes the saint. No stigma is cast on the Christian character of the jailer. His name is left on the sacred page as a fair candidate for immortal blessedness. And we are happy in the assurance, that the promise of salvation on condition of faith, made to the trembling Philippian, has been fulfilled; and that he is now with Paul and Silas before the throne of God.

But delaying Felix—unhappy Felix—where is he? History tells us, that his companion, Drusilla, who could hear Paul reason of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come without being moved, and the child of their illicit connection, were consumed by a terrible eruption of Mount Vesuvius; and that Felix but narrowly escaped the punishment of his crimes from the hand of Roman justice. We cannot find, either in the Bible or in profane history, any indication that his heart was changed before death. All the circumstances attending his life and his conduct, so far as recorded, are calculated to lead the reflecting mind to fearful conclusions respecting his present condition. Were we to hope that he was not now lifting up his eyes in torments, and mingling his wailings with those of the damned; we should hope without evidence. Felix once trembled in view of judgment to come, but he ceased to tremble. His terrors and convictions soon subsided—his passions remained unsubdued, and extended their sway—and circumstances would strongly indicate, that while the jailer was now in Abraham's bosom, Felix was in the pit of endless despair.

From what has been disclosed in relation to the character and conduct of these individuals, we learn:

1. *That persons may resemble each other for a season, who in subsequent life and in eternity shall be vastly different.* The Philippian jailer and the Roman governor were, in important particulars, alike for a season. Alike they were sinners against God. Alike they had long remained insensible to their obligations and to their dangers. Alike they were instructed by an inspired apostle. Alike they trembled in view of the wrath to come. And alike they resolved to give the subject of religion their attention. But they were not always alike. The jailer determined to delay no longer obedience to heaven—he became a rejoicing convert—a kind friend to the apostles—an heir of life—and is now a glorified spirit in heaven. Felix delayed, for a more convenient season, making his peace with God—became a hardened sinner—cherished

his corrupt passions—narrowly escaped the hand of human justice—and is now, we have every reason to suppose, a fiend in hell. The jailer and Felix, for a season, walked the same road. At length the course which each pursued diverged one from the other, and continued to diverge, until the two travellers were separated by an impassable gulf.

And we, my hearers, have seen persons listening to the same religious instruction, alike believing its truth, and experiencing its power. We have witnessed them alike trembling in view of their sins, and heard them alike resolve to serve God. But they are now far different in character and conduct, and the present prospect is, that in the eternal world their states will be far different.

And you too may have seen persons convicted of sin; you may have witnessed them making haste to keep the commands of the Lord; you may have been acquainted with their rejoicing in God, their friendship to the godly, their discharge of Christian duty, and their bright prospects for eternity. And perhaps you may have become acquainted with the fact, that some of them died triumphing in faith. You may also have witnessed others convicted of sin, and resolved to serve the Lord. You may have observed them delaying the period of their reconciliation with heaven to a more convenient season, contemplated the evidence of their increasing iniquity, and their gloomy prospects for eternity, and perhaps you may have seen some of them die without hope of a blessed immortality. Oh, when I reflect, what a vast difference there may be in after-life, and in eternity between my hearers, it excites mingled emotions—emotions of joy, and emotions of sorrow. I rejoice in hope, that some, who are now listening to the instructions of God's word, will afford clearer and brighter evidence of possessing the spirit of Christ,—that hereafter they will be disposed to wash the stripes of persecuted piety, and cherish, in friendly hospitality and cheerful love, the faithful servants of Jesus,—that they will share in the prayers, and labors, and toils, and sacrifices, and hopes, and consolations, and triumphs, and glories of the followers of the Lamb. But oh, what may be the difference in character and state between such, and those who say to the word and spirit of the Lord: "Go thy way for this time!" Are there persons now in the Divine presence who will hereafter be neglecters of his institutions, arraying themselves against his truth, and against his children, and giving fearful evidence of increasing wickedness, and abandonment of heaven. Yes, there may be such persons present, and persons too who are now under the operations of the Holy Spirit. While we trust some before us, having served faithfully their God and generation, will sleep in Jesus, awake to the resurrection of life, and be for ever blessed with the Lord,—we expect nothing else but some of you, who will say to the Almighty Spirit, "Go thy way for this time," will fill up the measure of your iniquity, sink down into despair, be raised to the resurrection of damnation, and be for ever where is weeping and wailing.

2. *The difference between embracing religion now, and resolving to embrace it at a future period, is very great.* Had Paul been an incautious or an indiscriminating observer, he might not have marked the difference between the jailer and Felix, near the time of their trembling before him. The jailer said: "What shall I do to be saved?" and Felix said: "When I have a convenient season I will call for thee." Both heard with interest. Both trembled. Both appeared to be friendly to the subject of religion. And both resolved to give it their attention. The only apparent difference between them was, one then

embraced religion, the other designed to do it at a future period. This difference in conduct may appear to some persons to be indeed small. But mark, my hearers, the difference between him who embraces religion *now*, and him who intends to embrace it at a future period.

In the first place, the one yields to the suggestions of the Holy Spirit, and the other hesitates. The language of the Spirit to each individual is, *now* is the accepted time; and the heart of the one cheerfully assents to the declaration, and yields to the impulse, but the heart of the other is still rebellious. And that conscience may be quieted, this individual resolves to obey the voice of God at a subsequent period. There is a great difference between the feelings of that son who obeys his father without delay, and those of a son who says to his father, I cannot obey you *now*; leave me for the present, and go thy way for this time.

In the second place, the person who embraces religion *now* ceases to be under the power of sin. So soon as he begins to obey God, he is a servant of God. But the convicted sinner, however many his tears and deep his distress, who delays making his peace with God, is still a slave of sin. Let the resolution of future repentance be ever so unyielding, the person who formed it is engaged in a different service, and is under the direction of a different master from him who has entered the service of God. One is a servant of Christ, and the other is a servant of Satan.

In the third place, the person who embraces religion *now* may appropriate to himself the promises of the gospel. These promises are made to him. Having given his heart to God, God stands pledged to be his father and his friend. But there are no promises to him who resolves to give God his heart at a future period. He may resolve and re-resolve a thousand times over to give his heart to God; yet there are to him no gracious promises. Notwithstanding all this,

"Alas, I read, and see it plain
The sinner must be born again,
Or drink the wrath of God."

And again, the person who engages in religion *now* may have assurance of heaven; while it remains fearfully uncertain whether the resolution of the other is ever executed. Fearfully uncertain, did I say! The purpose of Felix to attend to the concerns of his soul at a convenient season, we suppose was not accomplished. Did any of my hearers abide by the resolution to become pious at a future period? Did any of you ever know a person who determined to become pious at a subsequent day, week, or month, who found his resolution to stand? How many resolutions of this character have we all broken? Though there should be found instances of persons becoming pious at times before specified, there never was a resolution like that of Felix which was kept inviolate. All such resolutions are formed with reliance on human strength to the displeasure of God. The resolve of an immediate surrender to God must be performed before any soul will have ground for rejoicing in Christ. It does not then remain merely uncertain, whether such resolutions will be kept. They will be broken. They always have been broken. But it remains fearfully uncertain, whether the person who says to the Eternal, "Go thy way for this time," however strong and unyielding his present determination to become a child of God at a future period—it remains fearfully uncertain whether he ever has part or lot in the lasting blessings of the Gospel. My friends, those

resolutions of yours to prepare for death and heaven at some future time, are a most insidious snare of the devil, by which you are taken. In the formation there was no yielding of heart to God, no bending under the cords of sin; they contain nothing from which the image of Christ is reflected, nothing on which can be predicated a single promise of the Bible, and nothing which renders your salvation more hopeful. They should not silence a single murmur of your consciences. They should not calm a single rising fear of your hearts. They should not occasion a single tear to be wiped from your eyes. They should not cause you to dream of heaven for a single moment. But that you have to this day formed no resolutions of piety, except such as that by which Felix drove Paul from his presence, and the Holy Ghost from his heart, should fill you with deep regret and serious alarm.

2. *There are periods in the life of all, which appear to be solemnly critical, and of infinite moment.* Had the jailer, when prostrated at the apostle's feet, looked forward to a time for effecting his reconciliation with God, in reference to the message of salvation—had he said, "Go thy way for this time," and thus driven from his presence the Holy Spirit, no being could tell what would now have been his allotment. Had he said to Paul, "Go thy way for this time," instead of having been now on a throne, in the likeness of Jesus, surrounded by heavenly hosts, and engaged in an anthem of praise for redeeming grace; he might have been where peace and hope are unknown. And, my brethren in Christ, had we been suffered to defer our hopeful reconciliation with God another half-hour—had the crisis been passed without the surrender of our hearts to God—had the critical moment on which life and death, heaven and hell, in reference to us were poised, been misimproved: an Omnipotent God only could tell, what would have been our present and eternal state. We will thank him, and praise his holy name in hope, that then he was pleased to incline our hearts unto himself.

And had not the heart of Felix, while he was trembling before Paul, suggested a season of delay in making his peace with God—had not Felix, with an inspired apostle before him, his sins in array, and eternity in view, foolishly and wickedly waited for a more convenient season—he might have been this day with Paul and Gabriel in glory. But oh, the state of heart which prompted that one sentence at this critical moment, "Go thy way for this time." Will not this sentence be remembered with interminable anguish?

And had not some of my impenitent hearers breathed the same spirit of delay, their names ere this would have been enrolled, as believers, in the Lamb's book of life. While in the sanctuary of God, they would have held a title to crowns and thrones in the heavens. But like Felix they have said, "Go thy way for this time," and condemnation is still resting upon them.

And may not the present be a period solemnly critical, and of infinite moment to some hearers? My friend, the Spirit of God may, at the present time, be nearer to you than ever after, if he is now resisted. The crisis with you may now have arrived, and the reception or rejection of offered grace to-day may settle your destiny for ever. Will you breathe the request of further delay? Shall Felix's language be again adopted, "Go thy way for this time"? Oh, how will it tell in your dying hour! How will it tell at the bar of Christ! And how will it tell to all eternity! Cast down your weapons of rebellion, give God your heart, and rely on Christ for pardon and sanctification; and soon you shall be with the jailer in heaven.

, are
ation
on
g on
which
mur-
your
yes
the
this
his

let,
feet,
me
this
could
this
suc-
ing
my
with
e of
ven
ent
We
o-
ng.
an
ly
his
ed
ill
y
e's
to
y
e
at
h
y
e
d
d
l